

Florida **WILDLIFE**[®]

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**2001
PHOTOGRAPHY
WINNERS**





Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
2001
Publisher

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A Message from the Executive Director



To succeed in any business and to improve your service, it helps to know how your customers feel about your product. A comprehensive survey of 691 *Florida Wildlife* subscribers by the Florida Government Performance Survey Research Center gave us some valuable feedback about our readers. First, we were pleased to learn that 98 percent rated the magazine as either excellent or good. According to the Research Center's Jay Rayburn, "Such a result is unheard of. I've never seen a publication rated so high."

Ninety-one percent of readers graded the art and photography an A or B. Ninety percent gave the quality of news and information provided in each issue an A or B. And 87 percent gave regular features an A or B. Sixty-one percent have been receiving the magazine more than five years; the other 39 percent split almost evenly between fewer than three years, and three to five years. It's clear that *Florida Wildlife* readers are quite happy with this publication.

Perhaps no other magazine in Florida covers as broad a range of outdoor recreation and environmental subjects as *Florida Wildlife*, reflecting our agency's mission, and the survey mirrors that. For example, 68 percent of our readership either boat, canoe or kayak; 68 percent fish in fresh water; 66 percent bird watch; 58 percent fish in salt water; 51 percent photograph wildlife; 41 percent hunt; 40 percent have cleaned up a beach, park or wildlife area; and 39 percent camp.

One purpose of the survey was to help us chart a course to achieve self-sufficiency for the magazine. Currently, there are three sources of funding used to publish *Florida Wildlife*: subscriptions, the state of Florida and the Wildlife Foundation of Florida, Inc. Subscriptions cover a third of the costs. Taxpayer demands that government be smaller, more efficient and cost-effective dictate that the people who read and enjoy this magazine assume more of the responsibility for publishing it. Likewise, the people who support *Florida Wildlife* say they are willing to do so.

The *Florida Wildlife* staff is embarking on a major drive to attract more subscribers. Also, the price of an annual subscription will increase to \$15 in January, still a great bargain at only \$2.50 per issue. Discounts will still apply for multi-year subscriptions.

We also plan to start accepting Mastercard/Visa payment for a subscription. This will enable you to start receiving the magazine by making a simple phone call.

This is the start of a new era for *Florida Wildlife*. You've clearly stated that you are loyal to the magazine and want to see it thrive. You've spoken; we've listened. Now, we hope you will tell your friends about it. Ask them to call (850) 488-9477 so that they, too, can discover this award-winning publication. We're going to make it easier for you to receive and continue to enjoy *Florida Wildlife*.

— Allan L. Egbert, Ph.D.

Florida WILDLIFE®

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COVERS

Young Gray Squirrels by Eileen Fonferko adorns the front cover and *Anhinga With Bream* by Emi Allen is featured on the back cover. See the 2001 Photography Contest Winners on page 2.

 printed on recycled paper

2001 PHOTOGRAPHY

Contest Winners

Wild Birds

Once again, it was a difficult task poring over the hundreds of entries for this year's photo contest, difficult because so many were exceptional. This year's bird category could be termed as "the year of the anhinga" for two striking anhinga photos by two different photographers, our first and second place winners (see back cover for first place photo). And check out the young squirrels on the cover, the winning photo in the wild animals category. That was a unanimous winner by the judges.

Judging was based on composition, proper exposure, focus, color, printability and the uniqueness and difficulty of the shot. We hope you'll agree that the winners have met all of these criteria.

This issue contains winners in the wild bird and the wild animals categories. The Florida natural environment winning photos will be published in the January-February issue, and they are equally exceptional. ▷

FIRST PLACE: *Anhinga With Bream*
by Emi Allen, Jacksonville (See back cover)

SECOND PLACE:
Female Anhinga by Jean Becker,
Venice, page 3





Wild Birds

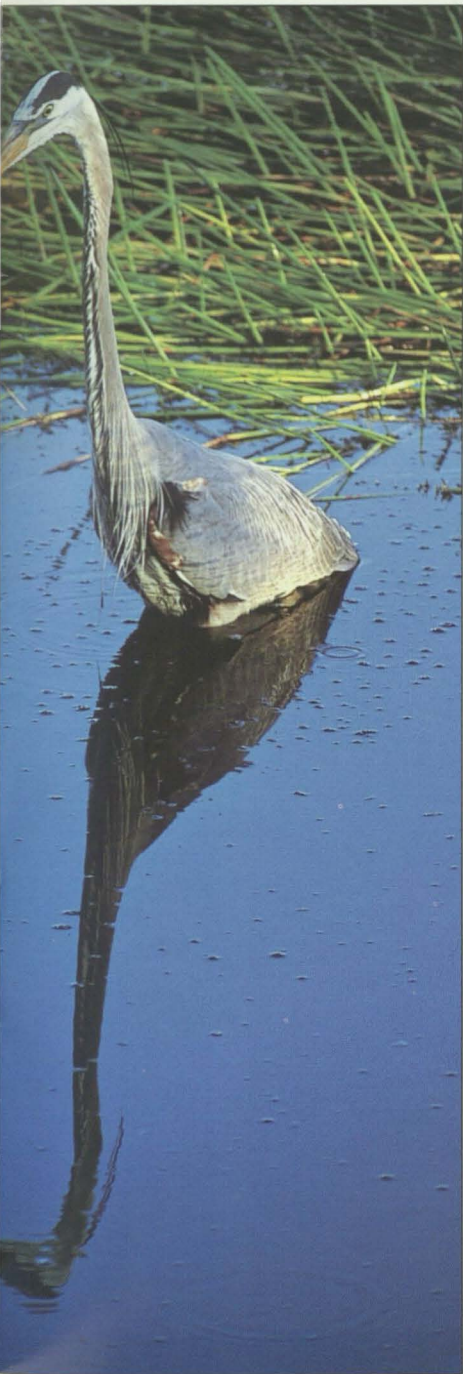


THIRD PLACE, Tied:
Eastern Meadowlark
by Norman Bateman,
Ft. Myers, left

HONORABLE MENTION:
Great Blue Heron by
Terry Livingstone, Franklin,
Tennessee, below



THIRD PLACE, Tied:
Great Egret
by Joseph Vogan,
Jacksonville, right



Wild Birds

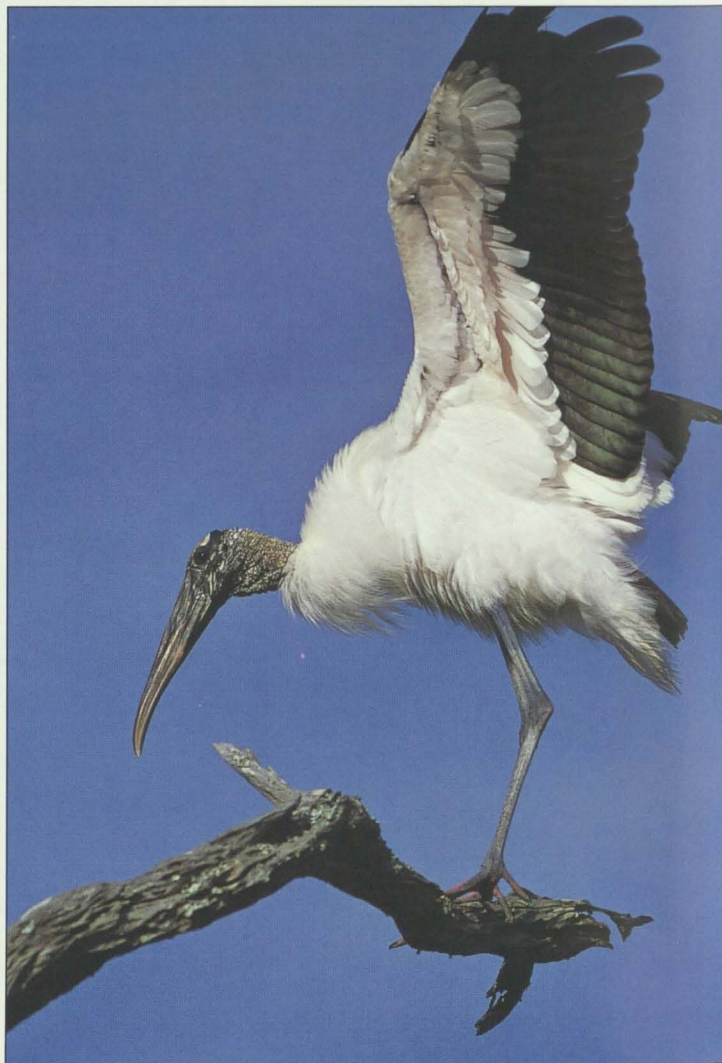
HONORABLE MENTION:

Great Blue Heron by Leroy Simon, Belleview, right

HONORABLE MENTION: *Woodstork* by Monroe Seitner, Jacksonville, bottom right

HONORABLE MENTION:

Snowy Egret by Emi Allen, Jacksonville, below



Enter The 2002 *Florida Wildlife Photography Contest*

The *Florida Wildlife* 2002 Photography Contest deadline is June 17, 2002. All entries must be submitted as original slides. For contest rules and entry form, contact Photo Contest, Florida Wildlife, 620 S. Meridian Street, Tallahassee, FL 32399-1600; call (850) 488-5563; request a FAX at (850) 488-8974; or check the *Florida Wildlife* Internet site at www.floridawildlifemagazine.com. So, have fun exploring Florida's wild places and keep those camera shutters clicking!

Wild Animals



SECOND PLACE: *Gopher Tortoise* by Tina Wright, Port Orange



Wild Animals

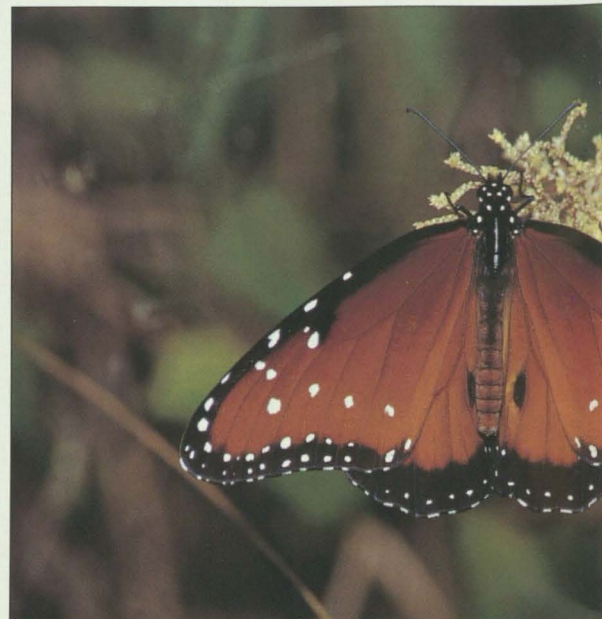
FIRST PLACE: *Young Gray Squirrels* by Eileen Fonferko, Estero
(see front cover)



HONORABLE MENTION:
Lynx Spider on Sunflower
by Donna Bollenbach, Wimauma



HONORABLE MENTION:
Queen Butterfly by Tom Pawlesh,
Jefferson Hills



THIRD PLACE, Tied:
Key Deer
by Norman Bateman,
Fort Myers



Wild Animals



HONORABLE MENTION:
Polyphemus Moth
by Kevin Barry, Hollywood,
page 11 (top)

THIRD PLACE, Tied:
Green Sea Turtle
by Michael W. Ewanus,
Miami, page 11 (bottom)

HONORABLE MENTION:
Raccoon by Cindi Bateman, Fort Myers, left

HONORABLE MENTION: *Alligator and Turtle*
by Karin Connolly, Orlando





Wild Rivers, Limpkins *and* the Mall

A Father's Story

Text and Photographs by Doug Alderson

It was a classic modern conflict: my 15-year-old daughter and I both had a day off, she from school and I from work, and we wanted to spend it together. But she wanted to go to a mall and a movie; I wanted to canoe a wild river and photograph wading birds. Irreconcilable differences? No, we simply decided to do both.

On the morning of the outing, I pulled Cheyenne out of bed after frequent wake-up attempts and cajoled her into helping me load the canoe onto the mini van. I appreciated the fact that she is now strong enough to help me with such tasks. Since entering my 40-something years, I am not too proud to enlist help in lifting heavy or bulky objects.

During the 20-minute drive to the Wacissa River just east of Tallahassee, Cheyenne asked an all too typical question: "Can I change the station?" My oldies radio station was, well, "too old." The easy listening one – "too slow." The news station, "too boring." I grimaced when the contemporary pop/hip-hop station was chosen. I have determined that some aspects of fatherhood involve an occasional suspension of sanity in order to obtain peace in the household. After all, our children are only with us for a short time. I was still relieved when we were finally floating on the water, sans man-made noise that sometimes passes off as music, and enjoying a wide river panorama.

Quietly cruising along a shore of thick trees, shrubs and protruding logs, it was easy to pick out snowy egrets, white ibis and tri-colored herons against a green backdrop. Yellow-crowned night herons, green herons and little blue herons were more difficult to spot. A great blue heron seemed to pose for us as we floated to within 30 feet. At first it stood stock-still, and then it began preening as if to show that our presence was being tolerated.



It was certainly a challenge to set up a tripod in a canoe and take good bird photos, but I could keep the camera still as long as I parked the boat on a thick floating mat of hydrilla. It was one of the few advantages I could see for the pesky waterweed that is clogging many Florida waterways, including the Wacissa. Having Cheyenne hold the boat steady with her paddle also helped. She was the ideal companion for wildlife watching – quiet, cooperative and interested. Plus, the coming mall trip was an extra incentive. No matter what you call it, “positive reinforcement,” “incentives” or whatever, parenthood involves liberal doses of bribery and compromise stirred into a batter of love.

We proceeded downriver at an ultra slow pace. No matter how quiet we tried to be, Suwannee cooters plopped off logs well ahead of our arrival. Little blue herons squawked their alarms. Raspy hawk cries and the high-pitched laughs of pileated woodpeckers punctuated the air. I

spotted a limpkin moving into the trees, but Cheyenne missed it. “The limpkin is one of the more uncommon birds in north Florida,” I tell her, trying to impress upon her the uniqueness of the experience that she missed. “Maybe we’ll see another one.” We surveyed an array of empty apple snail shells that lay around the log where the limpkin had been feeding. Cheyenne picked out a shiny brown one to keep that matched the color of limpkin feathers but without the white flecks.

Limpkins have all but disappeared on the nearby Wakulla River. Biologists speculate that thick hydrilla growth, spurred by high nitrogen levels in the water, is preventing apple snails from climbing above the water line to lay their pink and cream colored eggs on vegetation and cypress knees. The Wacissa must be taking up the slack because I had spotted seven of the large wading birds on a recent outing.

I had peaked Cheyenne’s interest enough to turn our outing into a quest to

find a limpkin. Still, there were plenty of other sights. Cheyenne pointed out a banded water snake wriggling past the boat. An osprey whistled as it soared overhead. Cicadas whirled. Frogs bellowed. I searched for the swallow-tailed kites that I had often seen along the river – six in one group on a previous outing – but saw none of the quiet and graceful raptors. Also, after another mile, no limpkins. I silently asked for a bit of cooperation from Mother Nature. I had a teenager to impress, one who was saturated with pop music, mall shopping, contemporary Hollywood flicks, schoolwork and all the social extremities of high school life. There were also driving lessons and the eventual discussions about buying her own car. Canoeing the Wacissa was a natural, and inexpensive, addition to a teenage world still being shaped.

We stopped for a swim at Big Blue, a 45-foot-deep spring along a riverside creek. It is one of 12 known springs ▷



Cheyenne Hunt-Alderson, 15, enjoys canoeing AND visiting the mall.

Page 12: A Wacissa River limpkin. The Wacissa is one of the Big Bend’s wildest rivers.



A great blue heron across from the Wacissa's main headwater springs.

scattered along the upper mile and a half of the river. We met four people from England who were seeing a bit of "wild America." They were enthralled by the river but dismayed that the normally clear spring was murky due to recent rains.

I usually meet local residents at Big Blue. A long cable has been looped over a curving tree and I have often watched daredevils take Tarzan-like swings into the spring. Unlike other area swimming holes, Big Blue is surprisingly free of trash. "It's the locals who keep this place clean," one man had explained to me. "We take care of the river."

One change along the Wacissa that has elicited mixed reactions from local residents is the ongoing purchase of extensive tracts of riverfront property for preservation by the state of Florida. Folks are nervous about any kind of change, but an onslaught of riverfront homes and docks would not be welcome either. State officials have assured river users that opportunities will remain for hunting, fishing, swinging from trees and for photographing wading birds.

Leaving Big Blue, I was delighted to hear a loud clucking type sound. "I think that's a limpkin," I whispered to

Cheyenne. "Let's just drift around the bend and see if we can find it." Closely related to rails and cranes, limpkins are also known as "the crying bird" for their eerie mournful cries, but we just hear a kr-ow, kr-ow, kr-ow. Nearly hidden behind tall spires of wild rice, we spot the limpkin. It was feeding on an apple snail alongside a weathered log. After finishing the treat, he began to bob his head and neck up and down in a strange kind of dance while doing his clucking sound. This halting type of gait reminded early observers of someone walking with a limp, thus the name "limpkin."

From deep within the flood plain forest, we heard an answering kr-ow from an unseen limpkin. A distant duet was soon established with the visible limpkin. "This is incredible," I whispered. "I've never witnessed this before. Very few people do."

Cheyenne nodded, appearing interested. Perhaps she wouldn't forget the mall entirely (limpkins aren't THAT mesmerizing), but in the long run, I knew that this experience would be more memorable.

Most of my previous limpkin encounters had been on the river boat

cruise at Wakulla Springs State Park. Along with very healthy looking alligators, limpkins were a highlight of the tour, a feature that is now sorely missed by park personnel and visitors. The disappearance of any native animal that has inhabited a place for millennia is often seen as a bellwether of future troubles. The limpkin is a "species of special concern" in Florida for good reason.

Eventually, the limpkin we were watching retreated toward its companion in the flood plain forest and so we

began paddling our way back upriver. We watched a mother wood duck escort her ducklings across the river, frequently calling to a straggler in the brood. That elicited an excited response from Cheyenne. Baby ducks, covered in downy feathers, are enough to melt any young person's heart. It was all part of the Wacissa's magic, the magic of a wild river.

We docked the boat just as rain began to fall. I quickly shuttled my camera and gear to the van. The rain paused in time for us to load the canoe. It also allowed me to say a silent goodbye to the Wacissa, a river utilized by humans for over 12,000 years and never tamed. Even its name is so old that its meaning has been lost, buried with the early Apalachee or Spaniards. Soon, I would enter a domain where wildness is forbidden – a mall. Still, I vowed to take part of the river with me in thoughts and dreams.

Later, when I closed my eyes, I hoped to envision the patriarchal great blue heron that perches across from the main headwater springs, and the more secretive limpkins bobbing and poking into waterweeds, perhaps not knowing the small but special niche they fill in a father's relationship with his daughter. 🐾

Doug Alderson is the new associate editor of Florida Wildlife.

~ CHANGE ~

An Officer's Perspective

Text and Photographs by Andy Signell

On my first day as a young officer with the then Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission in 1987, I was traveling south on US 27 toward Moore Haven when a fellow officer's voice came across the radio. The sound of an outboard motor revved noisily in the background. "4182 Lakeland," he called. "I am in pursuit of (a resource violator I won't name) and he is throwing bags of fish overboard. I am 10 miles offshore and heading to Clewiston. Send back-up to the marina."

When I met the fellow officer several days later, I told him, "I heard you on the radio the other day chasing a fisherman. I didn't know we worked the ocean. Where did you launch from?" He looked at me with a puzzled expression and said, "We don't work the ocean." I replied, "I heard you say you were 10 miles offshore." After he quit laughing, he explained to me that "Lake Okeechobee is 40 miles wide." That was a valuable first lesson, one where my perception of a freshwater lake changed. Other lessons in the past 15 years often centered around dramatic changes in the agency for which I work: the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC).

Perhaps the biggest change that I encountered was with my job description. Wildlife officers are a thing of the past, just like marine patrol officers. We are now state law enforcement officers. Fifteen years ago, who would have thought that I might be offshore in the ocean, protecting Florida's natural resources? With the merger of the former Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission and the Marine Fisheries Commission in 1999, tomorrow I could be there.

In the 1980s as a game warden, I could spend several days on horseback patrolling in the wilderness of Glades County attempting to catch a poacher. Today as an officer, there are very few minutes in an eight-hour shift that I'm not dealing directly with a natural resource problem that has come to someone's attention. I must process each problem expediently because I may deal with four or five a day in addition to my routine patrol duties. The natural resources are under constant use, in most areas around the clock. From recreational boaters to consumptive users, not many public trails or waterways are left untraveled. My question to you is, are you willing to help?

We are in a time when it is every person's responsibility to help protect what is ours. When you see a violation, you should call the Wildlife Alert Hotline (1-888-404-3922). If you go hiking, I recommend taking a bag and picking up the trash that you see. All of us should throw back the undersize trout and let the short-antlered deer walk. Remember, when you leave, another follows. I ask that we merge together as citizens, to protect and preserve. Change has caught up to all of us. 🦋

Andy Signell is an FWC officer located in Brevard County.

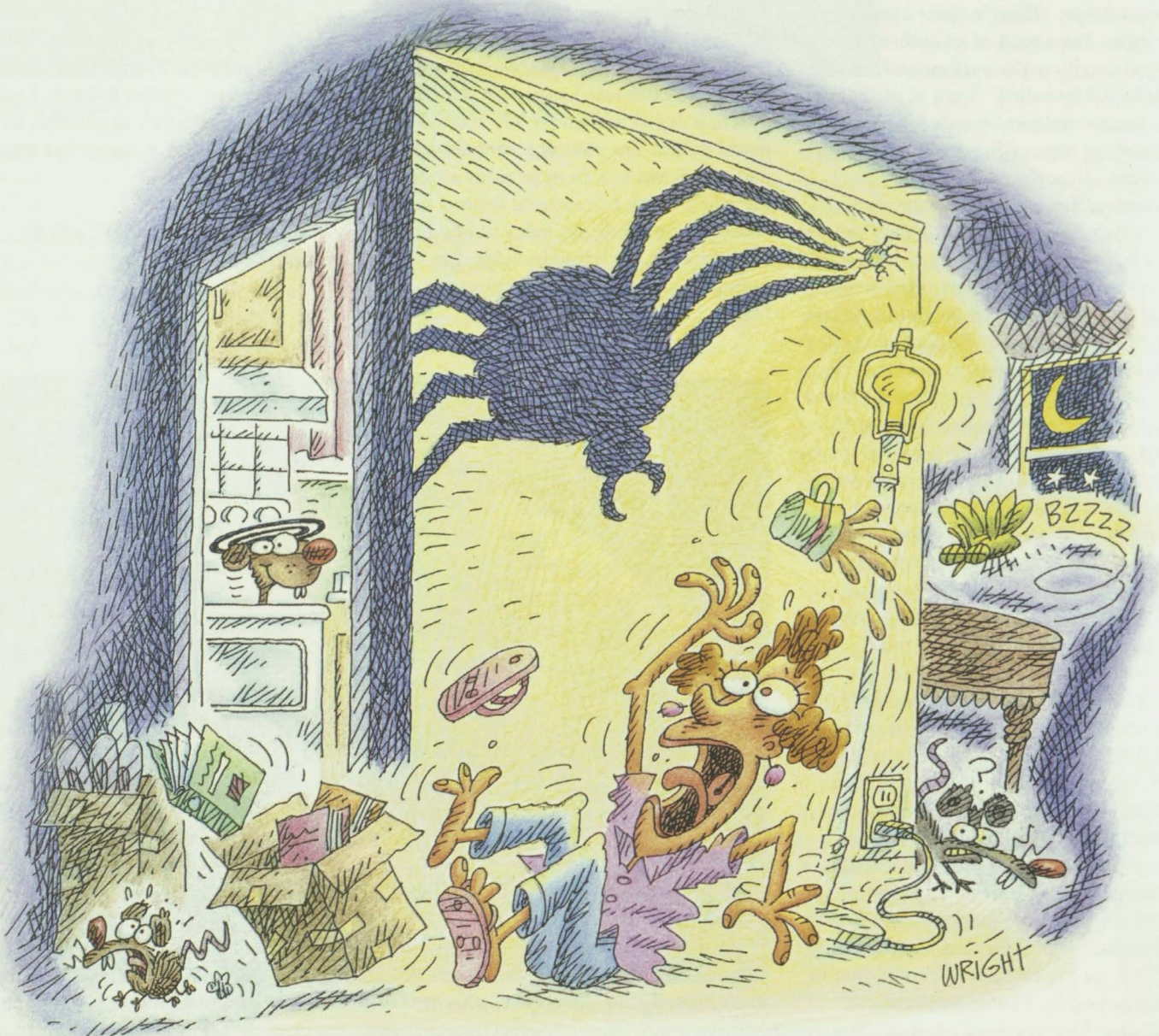


Andy Signell with a firearm confiscated in an unlawful nighttime hunt.

I'll Take Florida

By Stephanie L. Smith
Illustration by Mike Wright

***When I recount these tales to my Los Angeles friends,
their sympathy is overwhelming.***



...Critters and All

They tell me those gigantic wolf spiders are completely harmless, but I don't believe it. How can anyone say such a thing when people must be tripping and breaking their necks trying to get away from them?

I'll never forget my first encounter with one. I had just moved back to Florida from Los Angeles after losing everything in the Northridge earthquake. As I sat on the floor of my condo, the light from a long shadeless lamp at my side, I saw a movement from the corner of my eye. I don't think words can describe the terror I felt when I saw that foot-and-a-half-wide creature creeping along my wall. The fact that it was actually a five-inch spider whose shadow was being projected did little to quell my fear; I had never seen such a sight in my life, outside of a 60s horror flick, that is.

I don't like to kill things, so I used a broom to encourage the spider toward an open door. Unfortunately, a palmetto bug big enough to beat me up flew in while I was trying to get the spider out. During the next few months, I found that spiders and palmetto bugs weren't to be my only uninvited guests, so I had to learn other techniques for removal as well.

My brother-in-law taught me how to catch mice with a broom and a paper sack. He's pretty good at it; over the past 18 years he's caught most of the 20 snakes in his Merritt Island home that way. I'm sure my neighbors thought I was some kind of nut as they watched me, once or twice a week, run out my front door wearing knee-high suede boots and

elbow-length rubber gloves, a brown paper bag clutched warily in my hand. I sealed up all the holes around plumbing and any other possible means of entrance for the rodents, and that seemed to take care of the mice – the little field mice, that is.

If it hadn't been for my neighbor, George, I probably would have moved back to LA, earthquakes and all. He was on hand to chase out the huge black tree rat that ran in through my open back door. Even my 17-pound cat was scared of that critter. Usually quite a rodent hunter, she took one look, dashed through the front door and hid under the car. George was also there to catch the brown thrasher that flew in and took refuge behind the entertainment center. Brooms aren't too handy in a case like that. And just try using a broom to help a wild rabbit back out the door. I'm here to tell you that a baby rabbit can jump seven feet in any direction – including straight up, even if you are standing directly over him.

My sister Kim says I must have some special attraction for wildlife because I'm the only one having these adventures, but that's not true. I reminded her of the baby alligator she found under her car and the opossum that took up residence in her garage, perched directly over the washer – which happened to be open and full of wet clothes. Then there was the goose that flew down her chimney and into the family room, bringing a terrible mess with it. And how could she forget the hundreds of bats she found cohabiting her very short-term rental in Rockledge?

But Kim may be right. I don't know of anyone but me who's been lucky enough to come home to find a flying

squirrel living in the stove. Unfortunately, the squirrel decided to stay and nest in my oven batting, popping her head up through the burner hole every now and then to see what was going on. The gas man had to come out at midnight to unhook my stove and move it into the woods, and I'm sure he thought I was a nut, too. He kept looking up into the trees, saying, "I don't see anything flying . . ." I've often wondered what he thought my real reason was for hauling my stove into the woods at midnight. I took the stove apart and removed the dirty batting. Even so, for the next two years, every time I baked brownies there was the faint smell of urine in the air.

When I recount these tales to my Los Angeles friends, their sympathy is overwhelming. They can't imagine living in such a "wild" place. But when I think about the strange and sometimes annoying animal encounters I've had since my return to Florida, I remember the wildlife-less years I spent in LA, where the smog was so thick that I couldn't see the sky, let alone the birds, and where I never had the occasion to see a 5-foot wing spread on a great horned owl as it took off in flight 10 yards from my door. And I realize that these adventures have brought an inner peace to me that I never had in LA, because for me, true quality of life is all about enjoying nature—both human and animal. So I'll take Florida any day, critters and all. 🐾

Stephanie L. Smith is a free-lance writer from Melbourne. Read some of her other stories at www.StephieSmith.com.

Sidney Lanier's Ocklawaha

By James Huffstodt

More than a century ago, a young Georgia poet and Confederate veteran journeyed up the pristine Ocklawaha River aboard the steamboat *Marion* and was captivated by the wild splendors of what he called, “a black band of mystery.” His name was Sidney Lanier, the “Poet of the South.”

“For a perfect journey God gave us a perfect day,” he wrote in 1875. “The little Ocklawaha steamboat *Marion* – is like nothing in the world so much as a Pensacola gopher (tortoise) with a preposterously exaggerated back. ...

“As we advance up the stream our wee craft even seemed to emit her steam in more leisurely whiffs, as one puffs one’s cigar in a contemplative walk through the forest,” he wrote, later describing the twisting stream as, “the sweetest water-land in the world ... miles of pure delight betwixt hedgerows of oak and cypresses and palms and bays and magnolias and mosses.”

Lanier, 33, was a southern gentleman of education and breeding, the son of a successful attorney who had enjoyed a life of culture and

privilege before the Civil War. He was also a man obsessed with poetry, literature and music. Doomed to die at 39 from tuberculosis, Lanier came to Florida in 1874 to write a “guide and handbook” extolling this semi-tropical paradise.

The promise of hard cash in a land still wounded by war overcame the poet’s distaste for crass commercialism. Even a romantic has to eat. The Atlantic Coast Line Railroad paid Lanier generously to write a promotional guidebook to spur railroad ticket sales to rich Yankee tourists, settlers and investors.

Florida: its Scenery, Climate, and History. A Complete Hand-Book and Guide was for many years the standard

guide to Florida. Today, Lanier’s 1876 book is a curious relic appealing mainly to antiquarians and book collectors. The pages are crowded with practical minutiae: where passenger steamers dock on the St. Johns River, hotel recommendations, railroad schedules and routes, the price of shingles, or tips on growing citrus and tobacco.

Modern readers will find many passages difficult to digest: great turgid chunks of Victorian verbosity. One example is how Lanier praises the restorative powers of the Florida sun:

“Here one has an instinct that it is one’s duty to repose broad-faced upward, like fields in the fall, and to lie fallow



under sun and airs that shed unspeakable fertilizations upon body and spirit.”

The patient reader, however, who endures the “unspeakable fertilizations” and other ludicrous intervals will be rewarded. Lanier’s Ocklawaha River chapter contains fragments of prose that are literate and evocative. The reader journeys along a dark liquid tunnel threading through forested wilderness.

“The people of the boat moved not, and spoke not,” he wrote. “The white crane, the curlew, the limpkin, the heron, the water-turkey, were scarcely disturbed in their quiet avocations as we passed, and quickly succeeded in persuading themselves after each momentary excitements of our gliding by that we were really after all no monster, but only some daydream of a monster. ...”

“The lucent current lost all semblance of water. It was simply a distillation of many-shaded foliages, smoothly sweeping along beneath us. It was green trees, fluent. ... The glassy dream of a forest over which we sailed,” he wrote.

The author gives the patient reader compelling literary snapshots of Florida wildlife. A tourist blurts out that a snake is dancing with its head waving above the water. The steamboat engineer, coming on deck from his watch below, politely informs the newcomer that the “snake” is a bird commonly called the water-turkey, snake-bird, or more properly the anhinga.

“The water-turkey is the most preposterous bird within the range of ornithology,” proclaims Lanier. “He is not a bird, he is a neck, with such subordinate rights, members, appurtenances and hereditaments thereunto appertaining as seem necessary. ... He has just enough stomach to arrange nourishment for his neck, just enough wings to fly painfully along ... and just big enough legs to keep his neck from dragging on the ground.”

The writer is at his best in evoking the “Elysian tranquility” afforded the steamboat traveler. Lanier drowns in the sun with his deck chair tipped back against the cabin wall and with one arm resting on the wooden railing. The steamboat’s wavering shadow drifts slowly by the cypress-lined shore.

“And so shall your heart forever afterwards interpret Ocklawaha to mean repose,” he concludes.

When darkness cloaks the river,



*A riverside hunting camp scene from Lanier's 1876 book.
Page 18: A landing on the Ocklawaha.*

Lanier imparts charming advice on how to pass the night:

“Let me tell you how to sleep on an Ocklawaha steamer in May. With a small bribe persuade Jim, the steward, to take the mattress out of your berth and lay it slanting just along the railing that inclosed the lower part of the deck. ... Lie flat-backed down on the same, draw your blanket over you, put your cap on your head in consideration of the night air, fold your arms, say some littler prayer or other, and fall asleep with a star looking right down your eye.”

Daylight reveals the *Marion* gliding over the increasingly transparent waters of the Silver Spring Run:

“The Run is very deep: the white bottom seems hollowed out in a continual succession of large spherical holes, whose entire contents of darting fish, of under-mosses, of flowers, of submerged trees, of lily-stems, and of grass-ribbons revealed themselves to us through lucent fluid. ... Great numbers of keen-snouted, blade-bodied garfish shot to and fro in unceasing motion with a multitude of crossing sword-blades wielded in tireless thrust and parry by invisible arms.”

The poet is also imaginative in his description of the water’s crystalline translucence when the steamboat enters Silver Spring proper:

“Presently the splash of an oar in a distant part of the spring sent a succession of ripples circling over the pool. Instantly it broke into a thousand-fold prism. Every ripple was a long curve of variegated sheen. The fundamental hues of the pool when at rest were distributed into innumerable kaleidoscopic flashes and brilliancies, the multitudes of fish became multitudes of animated gems, and the prismatic lights seemed actually to waver and play through there translucent bodies, until the whole spring, in a great blaze of sunlight, shone like an enormous fluid jewel. ...”

Passages like this illuminate the beauty of wilderness Florida as it was then and will never be again. The modern reader glimpses the wonders of the Ocklawaha River described by a gifted poet wise enough to write about more than the price of shingles, a train ticket to Cedar Key, or sailboat rental rates at the Jacksonville wharf. 🐢

James Huffstodt is the public information director of the FWC South regional office, West Palm Beach. He recently won a national news writing award from the Association of Conservation Information for an article on Lake Okeechobee.

Sidney Lanier

By James Huffstodt

Suffering from exhaustion and ravaged by tuberculosis, poet Sidney Lanier recuperated during the spring of 1877 in Tampa, and again fell under the spell of Florida's natural charms.

The holiday was the gift of a generous admirer and friend, Gibson Peacock, editor of the Philadelphia *Evening Bulletin*. The idyll by the Gulf inspired at least 11 poems with Florida themes.

The closing verse of "Tampa Robbins," 1877, reads:

*"I'll south with the sun, and keep
my clime;
My wing is king of the summer
time;
My breast to the sun his torch shall
hold;
And I'll call down through the
green and the gold
Time, take thy scythe, reap bliss
for me,
Bestir thee under the orange tree."*

The poet's "oneness" with nature and its wild creatures is also evident in a passage from "A Florida Sunday," 1877:

*"And each live whole in all: I sail
with thee
Thy Pelican's self is mine; yea,
silver sea,
In this large moment all thy fishes
ripples, bights,
Pale in-shore greens and distant
blue delights,
White visionary sails, long reaches
fair
Big moon-horn'd strands that film
the far-off air."*

Lanier was born in 1842 in Macon,



Georgia. The precocious youngster graduated from Oglethorpe College in Milledgeville just before the Civil War erupted. He enlisted in the Macon Volunteers, served in the Confederate Army signal corps, and then went to sea in the same capacity.

His ship, the Rebel blockade runner, *Lucy*, hove to in mountainous seas one dark night, November 2, 1864, about 14 hours steaming from Wilmington, North Carolina. She surrendered to the long cannon of the patrolling Yankee gunboat, *Santiago de Cuba*.

Lanier was taken to a prisoner-of-war camp at Point Lookout, Maryland, where he suffered near starvation, hard treatment and squalid living conditions. There he contracted the tuberculosis that was to end his life prematurely 17 years later.

After the war, the young soldier

reluctantly studied law and clerked in his father's office, dreaming always of making a life as a musician, poet or college professor.

Married, eventually the father of four, Lanier was forced to work as a hotel clerk, a publicist, tutor, headmaster and writer of classic tales simplified for children.

"Lanier spent precious and frustrating years trying to resolve the conflict between what his tradition expected of him and his own desires," wrote Jane S. Gabin in *American National Biography*, Vol. III, 1999... "As he wrote to his brother Clifford, 'An impulse, simply irresistible, drives me into the world of poetry and music.'"

Baltimore was his redemption. Although lacking formal training, Lanier possessed sufficient innate musical ability to win a position as first flutist with the city's Peabody Institute Orchestra. In 1879, he joined the faculty of John Hopkins University where he taught poetry and the English novel.

Tuberculosis killed him in 1881 in the mountains of North Carolina near Asheville.

He had gone there, an invalid by then, desperately seeking the always elusive cure.

A statue of Lanier was dedicated on the campus of John Hopkins in 1942. And, his gravestone at Baltimore's Green Mount Cemetery bears a fitting epitaph selected from "Sunrise," one of his most brilliant poems.

"I am lit by the sun." ●

The Southern Flying Squirrel

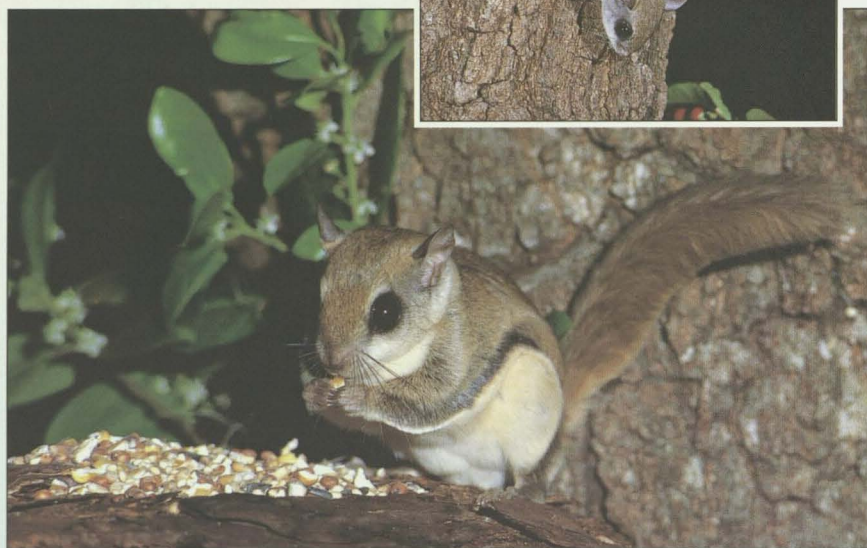
(*glaucomys volans*)

Text and Photographs by John Tyson

For most people, the southern flying squirrel is virtually unseen. And even during the orchestrated sounds of the night, their high-pitched “tseet” and other chirping sounds usually remain unidentified. But this small nocturnal creature of darkness is actually quite prevalent in most of Florida.

Flying squirrel habitat generally consists of mature oak and pine woods. They are commonly found in both urban and rural settings. The flying squirrel is a small critter approximately 8 to 10 inches in length, light brown in coloration with a white belly, and they have relatively large eyes. These squirrels do not actually fly, but glide from tree to tree. They have a fold of skin on each side of the body connecting the front and hind legs, which in effect serve as a sail. Their broad flat tail will also guide their flight. A typical flight pattern heads in a downward direction, levels out and ends in a slight upward motion. They have been known to glide distances of more than 150 feet. The thuds often heard in the middle of the night on your roof are often sounds of a flying squirrel. If you listen just after dusk, their voices are easily identified and heard as a single short screech.

These small tree squirrels prefer abandoned woodpecker holes or similar cavities in trees for shelter and nesting. Because of the scarcity of hollows in trees and the keen competition for such nesting sites, they will often take up residency in bird houses, particularly in the winter months. Summer homes are



Southern flying squirrels can be found at bird feeders after dark.

sometimes even made of leaves and sticks. The diet of a flying squirrel consists of small seeds, berries, insects, fungi and even meat. They will often raid bird nests, destroying eggs and eating the young.

Photo Tips

Pursuing a peek or even a photo shot of this elusive squirrel requires patience and prompting. Occupied birdhouses and bird feeding stations create the best photo opportunities. The outside entrance of a birdhouse will have small gnaw marks surrounding the entrance hole, indicating its presence. This location creates a good place to snap an image. A zoom lens with at least a 300 mm capability along with a flash are a must. Another option is to set up your camera and one or two

flashes on tripods near the feeder. Pre-focus your camera where you want to take the image. By using a shutter release cable and one or two ten-foot extensions, you can sit inside the confines of your home in complete comfort and snap away as the squirrels visit the feeding station. At first they will quickly retreat from the flash, but after several shots they will pay no attention to it. As always, whenever photographing nature, do not create any unnecessary stress or harm to your subject. Use a fast speed film for low light conditions, and be ready on the shutter. They're quick! 📸

John Tyson is a professional nature photographer/writer residing in Eustis.

The bear had completely demolished the deer feeder. What corn he had not eaten was scattered about and trampled into the soft soil.

From the sign he left, his size could not be determined, but the battered feeder bore mute testimony of tremendous strength.

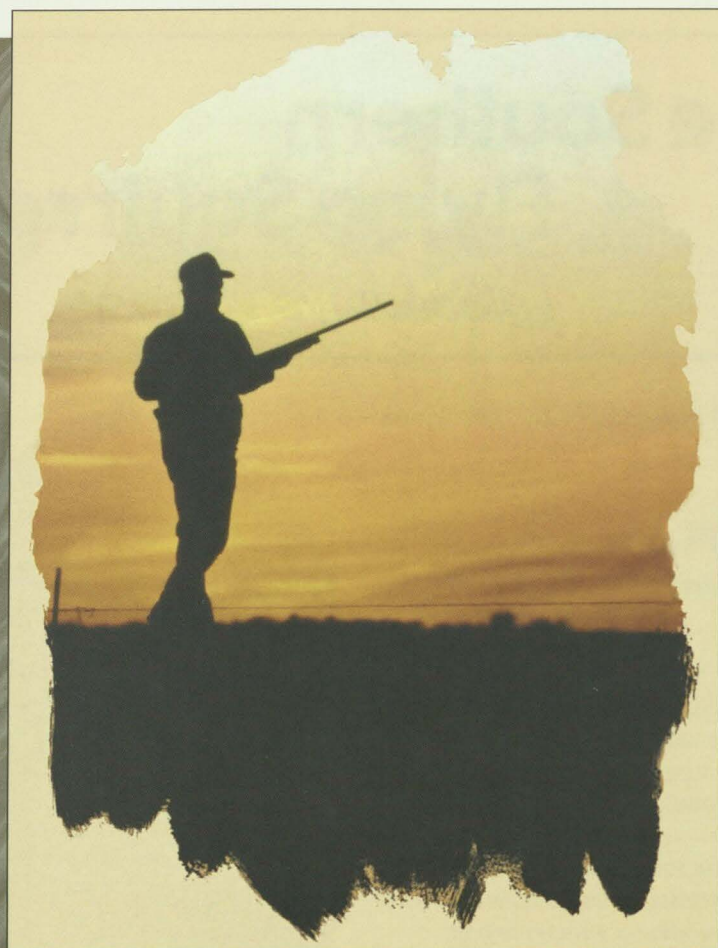
The feeder was less than a quarter mile from my home in rural Putnam County, Florida. The area abounds with a variety of game animals. Deer are plentiful, wild turkeys feed in the oak thickets, and in the springtime, the woods are filled with yelps, clucks and the occasional raucous gobble of a love-torn tom.

The bucolic setting is especially thrilling to me, a hunter who has spent most of his life in the city. Every year I had to drive farther and spend more money in order to enjoy my sport. Now, some of the best hunting in the state of Florida is at my doorstep, and I spend many pleasant days afield.

One Friday afternoon in December, hunting conditions were ideal. The moon was entering a major period, a cold front was moving in, and I felt certain that the deer would feed. I took extra precautions preparing for the hunt. I bathed with odorless soap, put on clean clothes washed without detergent and sprayed carefully with a scent neutralizer. I left home at 4:30 p.m. By 4:45, I was sitting among some thick oak limbs that touched the ground, completely camouflaged. The stand was also in a position downwind from the bedding ground and it allowed me to cover several trails leading to the feeding area.

Shortly after 5 p.m., two does came out of the brush, stopped about 10 yards away, and looked towards me. I sat perfectly still. They moved on, convinced that the lump of limbs was part of the landscape. The does were harbingers of what was to come. For the next 30 minutes, does, yearlings and button bucks passed by me in a constant stream. Some passed close enough that I could almost touch them. I was surrounded by deer; they were rustling brush and snapping twigs, but I did not see a legal buck.

To my left about 10 feet was a clump



Tom Evans

Hunting at Home

By Charles E. McKee

He could not see or smell me, but a deep-rooted sixth sense must have warned him that something was amiss.

of brush completely covered with wild grapevines. Frost had turned the remaining leaves a dull beige and they hung limply, moving slightly in the breeze. Something in the vines caught my attention. Moving only my eyes, I covered the area inch by inch. Then I saw what appeared to be two leaves standing upright. Suddenly, they moved and twitched. The "leaves" were the ears of a big buck. Through the brush, I could make out part of his neck, antlers and one brown eye watching me closely. He could not see or smell me, but a deep-rooted sixth sense must have warned him that something was amiss.

I shifted my gaze to avoid looking directly at the buck while watching him out of the corner of my eye. He would look the whole area over and then

suddenly look back at me to see if I had moved. This went on for about 10 minutes. He knew that something was wrong and was too cagey to move. The tension built until I could hardly breathe. I felt that the buck had the patience to stand there until dark, and light was rapidly fading. I had to make a move. My rifle was across my lap with the muzzle pointed towards the buck. If I could raise it about eight inches, I could shoot from the hip. I was not worried about missing; he was close enough to spit on. As he turned his head away, I ever so slowly raised the rifle barrel. At that precise moment, the buck quickly looked back at me, caught the slight movement, and bolted with a loud snort.

I sat there for several minutes gathering myself and letting the

adrenaline settle. Then, I picked up my light-weight folding chair, slung my rifle and started home. Perhaps I should have been disappointed, but I was not. It had been the experience of a lifetime. Never in 60 years of hunting whitetail deer had I seen so many in such a short period of time, or been so close to a mature whitetail buck.

The afternoon had involved walking 600 yards and hunting about an hour and a half. For the first time in my life, expenses were non-existent. My hunting license was free since I am over 65 years old, and I did not even crank up a vehicle! 🍷

Editor's note: Charles McKee wrote this story in 1998, a year before he passed away.



A mature whitetail buck, similar to the one seen at close range by the author.

Barry Mansell

The Last Season

Tribute to a Turkey Hunter

By Kevin Jeansonne

Ed Douglas was a veteran turkey hunter whom I met through his wife at my workplace. I had expressed my desire to learn the ropes of turkey hunting, and he decided to take me under his wing. I was more than happy to accept him as my tutor, especially since he was a Florida native and knew all there was to know about the Osceola turkey.

In February of 2000, I received a phone call to meet him at the Lochloosa Wildlife Management Area (WMA) near Gainesville for some scouting. We began early in the morning by listening at a location where he had previously heard gobbling. Sure enough, the gobbler sounded off, but farther off than the previous location. We went on foot as close as we could, and he proceeded to show me how to use a box call, then explained other calls I could use. Later that morning, he began to show me the art of setting up a blind out of palmetto fronds to conceal the hunter's movement.

Still scouting the next weekend, Ed drove me to a hammock on the opposite end of the WMA where he had seen turkeys feeding. He began to build for me a different kind of blind to match the surrounding area – a now dry cypress swamp near a rise of land. It was built out of cypress poles tied together with a moss camouflage.

Through our scouting, Ed covered the most important things about good hunting. He taught me about courtesy to other hunters, safety and game laws. He showed me aerial and topographic maps, stating how important it is to know the area you are hunting. He said, "I've shown you all I can about turkey hunting, and now it's all up to you and some good woodsmanship."

The day before the opening of turkey hunting season, Ed lent me a "Quaker



Boy" beginner calling tape. I also bought a "beginner's double" tape. Carefully listening to the tapes, I quickly learned the diaphragm call.

Opening day came early with Ed in his palmetto blind and me in my cypress blind at the opposite end of the woods. I was anxious to try my new call. Sitting in the dark of the woods with morning just beginning to break, I had the call ready and waiting. Just as stars began to fade, I began some soft yelping. I was immediately answered by one turkey and then another. Two hens passed close by and returned shortly with a young gobbler. He began his strut. Soon, I was excitedly toting my first gobbler back to my truck.

I was home by 9 a.m. and called Ed, to let him know the good news. He called back that afternoon and was laughing, telling me that as far as he knew, only one other hunter north of where he was sitting sounded off that day.

The following week I went out to my truck for lunch and saw two mysteriously

placed turkey feathers in my driver's window. I thought that maybe they had blown around my truck and stuck there. That afternoon I received a call from Ed: "Did you find two feathers stuck in your window? My son asked if I would get him a young turkey, so I went and filled the order."

We continued to hunt separately over the next week. Ed would often stop by or call to check up on me and give me words of encouragement such as "you're going to get that second gobbler." He would always tell of his day's experiences. One particular incident revealed his courtesy to other hunters. "I saw a gobbler walking the road," he said, "but this old fellow I met out there had been hunting him, so I kept going so he could kill him."

The day before I was to go out again, Ed called with more of his usual encouragement. Two days later, I received a message from my co-workers. In shock, I heard that he had passed away from a heart attack. My friend and trainer was no longer here.

With only a few days left to the season, I went out and got my second gobbler. As I walked out of the woods with my tom, I could almost hear Ed laughing and saying, "I knew you would get him."

At my home in my hobby room on my desk sits two turkey feathers ever to remind me of his last turkey. I have learned a lot about hunting the elusive Osceola turkey, but I will also never forget courtesy, safety and game law and the kind man who taught it to me. That cypress blind in the swamp still stands as a memorial to a honorable turkey veteran, Ed Douglas. ●

Kevin Jeansonne is an optician from Ocala.

2000-2001 HUNTING ACCIDENTS

The number of hunting accidents in Florida remained the same as last year. However, no fatalities occurred with firearms; there was one heart attack at the scene of an accident. The following incidents occurred between July 1, 2000, and June 30, 2001. Seven out of nine shooters had not attended a hunter safety course and three were unlicensed. One incident was considered an "unforeseeable accident."* As in past years, one-third of the incidents were self-inflicted.

October 14. Martin County, Deer

A person was shot while riding in a swamp buggy. A partner's loaded and primed muzzleloading rifle fell from a loosely made rack, struck the floor of the buggy and fired into the victim's abdomen. The bullet fragmented, damaging the liver, diaphragm, left lung and esophagus. The victim is expected to make a full recovery from his injuries. *Shooting caused by extreme carelessness, carrying a loaded and primed muzzleloader on a moving vehicle.*

November 14. Dixie County, Deer

Victim was still-hunting and fell asleep on his stool. Victim apparently slumped and moved gun, shooting off his index finger. *Pay attention! Do not leave firearms unsecured.*

November 26. Taylor County, Deer

Victim was standing on his dog box in the back of his truck when he was struck with a pellet of buckshot just above the elbow. His partner had entered the woods to intercept a deer. The deer passed between the shooter and victim as the shooter swung and shot. A warning was issued to the shooter for culpable negligence. *Be aware of what is beyond your target.*

December 2. Taylor County, Deer

Youth shot self in the foot while walking back to vehicle. Victim had cocked his rifle and was walking with his finger on the trigger. A toe was amputated and a warning issued to the adult for unsupervised child hunting. *Shooting caused by carelessness of shooter.*

***December 23. Liberty County, Deer**

Victim shot by another of his hunting party with a rifle at nearly 500 yards through dense pine and thick underbrush. The shooter fired three shots at a deer running into the woods. The investigating officer concluded that because of victim's elevation, distance from and inability to be seen by shooter, this was an unforeseeable accident. *Never fire in the direction of another person. Be certain of your target and what is beyond.*

January 6. Escambia County, Deer

Victim shot twice by another member of hunting party as victim was returning from stand at dark. Victim received multiple buckshot pellets over his body. The pellets entered flesh, severed a vertebral artery, broke arm and knee bones, and severed the spinal cord. The victim will likely remain paralyzed and never regain function of his legs. The shooter was charged with culpable negligence and failure to have taken a mandated hunter safety course. *Always assume any noise is a person until you identify game.*

January 13. Palm Beach County, Rabbits

The victim was pushing game for the shooter by walking ahead and to the side. The victim was shot with birdshot as a rabbit ran in his direction. Victim received multiple pellet strikes including one lodged into his head. Victim to recover; pellet will remain in place. *Know the position of the other hunters in your group.*

January 16. Osceola County, Squirrel

Victim shot self in upper thigh while re-holstering his pistol. The safety was not engaged and the hammer had been lowered on a chambered round. Note: Another member of the hunting party had a heart attack and died while assisting the evacuation from the woods. *Shooting caused by unsafe firearms handling.*

January 26. Hillsborough County, Rabbits

Victim shot by partner while crossing a fence. The trigger caught on an object, the gun discharged causing birdshot to strike the victim in the arm, chest and abdomen. Written warnings for failure to have hunting licenses and failure to have taken a mandated hunter safety course. *Never climb a fence or tree or jump a ditch with a loaded gun.*

The GRAY SNAPPER Meets Its Match

By Duel Christian

I've been out here for six hours and haven't caught a darn thing." This was said to me by an elderly gentleman who noticed I was staking out a fishing spot near him. I was having a lady friend of mine over for dinner that night. She loves seafood, so I thought I'd surprise her with some fresh seafood that I would catch myself.

I went to one of my favorite fishing spots, the old bridge at Tyndall Air Force Base in Panama City. I've caught a lot of fish off of that bridge and was sure that I would be lucky again.

I was angling for gray snapper, also known as mangrove snapper. While setting up my tackle, I glanced at the gentleman next to me. No wonder he hadn't caught anything! He had several large sinkers over a thick wire leader and a hook the size of a large diaper pin. He had pierced a huge wad of squid that looked like an old, misshapen baseball.

My eyes grew to the size of dinner plates as I saw more rigging than was adequate for an antique sailing vessel. The gentleman must have noticed my look of horror and asked me if anything was wrong.

"What are you planning to catch with

that?" I asked him, afraid of the answer I would receive.

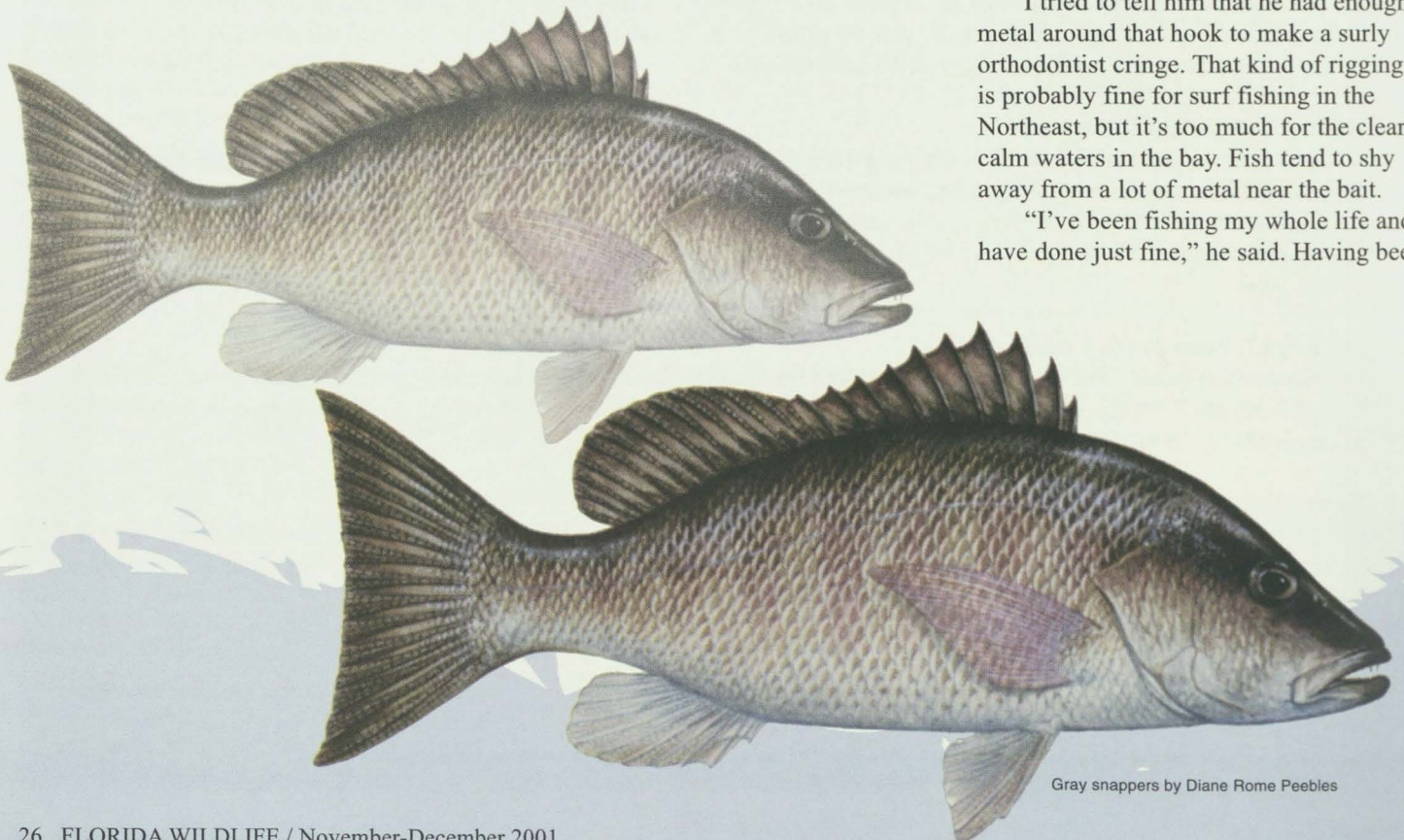
"Oh, anything that will hit it," he replied.

He then proceeded to fling his bait far out into St. Andrew's Bay. There was so much weight on the end of his line that he made it all the way into the shipping channel.

It was obvious to me that this gentleman wasn't used to fishing in these parts. Upon questioning him, I found out he was retired and had lived most of his life in New England. He decided he'd had enough snow for one lifetime and wanted to move somewhere sunny.

I tried to tell him that he had enough metal around that hook to make a surly orthodontist cringe. That kind of rigging is probably fine for surf fishing in the Northeast, but it's too much for the clear, calm waters in the bay. Fish tend to shy away from a lot of metal near the bait.

"I've been fishing my whole life and have done just fine," he said. Having been



Gray snappers by Diane Rome Peebles

reprimanded, I shrugged it off and finished seeing to my tackle. I was using live shrimp attached to a small hook with 15-pound test monofilament line for a leader. I had attached a small swivel to the leader and used two split shot sinkers to get the bait to the bottom. It's easier to feel a fish strike with lighter rods and tackle, so I was using eight-pound test line with an ultra-light rod and reel.

Now, the gray snapper is a wily fish. They like to congregate around structure. So bridge pilings are excellent places to find them. They are also a picky fish. They will rarely out and out strike a line. They prefer to pick at it. Occasionally, they will gently take the bait in their mouths and run with it and tear it right off the hook, using momentum to keep from getting hooked.

I dropped my line right next to a piling and immediately had a fish running with the bait. I let the line grow taut and yanked back to set the hook. Jackpot!! I brought up a nice size gray snapper! My neighbor cast a sidelong glance as I put this keeper in my bucket.

I immediately dropped my line right back where it was and WHAMMO! I brought up another gray snapper. I could feel the gentleman's eyes on me as I proceeded to bring up fish after fish.

I dropped my line around several pilings and within 20 minutes I had four keepers. I also tossed back several juvenile gray snapper and a small flounder. I now had enough fish for dinner with my lady friend. (I hoped to have some leftovers as well, YUM!)

Upon seeing my success, the gentleman walked over to me and asked me how I caught all those fish. He had



Sarah Kirkland, 12, tries her hand at fishing for the elusive gray snapper.

never seen a gray snapper before.

A gray snapper is a smaller cousin to the red snapper. They can be found throughout Florida, wherever any submerged structure or reefs may be found. The meat is firm and white and very succulent. I like it better than red snapper.

I showed the gentleman how my line was rigged and how to place it near the bridge pilings. I even gave him my remaining live shrimp. He fixed up his line while I gathered my things to leave, looking forward to the evening's events of good food and excellent company. As I turned and walked down the bridge to my car, I heard the man laughing to himself; he was pulling a struggling gray snapper from the blue waters.

Grilled Creole Gray Snapper With Grilled Vegetables

Ingredients:

- 6 gray snapper filets
- 1 cup yellow mustard
- 1 cup minced garlic
- 1 tablespoon cayenne pepper sauce
- 3 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- 2 teaspoons balsamic vinegar
- 4 tablespoons Creole seasoning
- 2 sprigs fresh thyme

- 1 eggplant, thickly sliced
- 3 zucchini squash, thickly sliced
- 4 beefsteak tomatoes, halved
- 2 large Vidalia onions, thickly sliced

To Make:

In a bowl, thoroughly mix mustard, garlic, Worcestershire sauce, balsamic vinegar, cayenne pepper sauce and Creole seasonings.

Set all food on grill. Continually brush mustard mixture on fish and veggies each time you turn them over.

Fish doesn't take that long to grill; take it off when the skin gets a little flaky. This should only take about four to six minutes.

Garnish fish with the leaves from the thyme sprigs.

Place grilled veggies around fish. Each veggie has its own distinct flavor that mixes well with the mustard sauce.

Serve with a light green salad and a dry white wine.

Serves four. Lighted candles are optional. ●

Duel Christian is a free-lance writer and avid outdoor chef living in Tallahassee.

Wildlife Friend

Steve Cross

Text and Photographs by Doug Alderson

Don't let Steve Cross' boyish grin, flannel shirt, overalls and unique Southern accent — reminiscent of early Cornwall settlers — fool you. Give him some derelict equipment, abandoned farm machinery and a few odds and ends and he will manufacture his own sawmill. Give him a tangled box of motorcycle parts, and a classic 1977 Harley Davidson Super Glide emerges. Gift Steve with stumps and odd pieces of wood, and he carves exquisite birds, animal heads and a cobra in a sack. And present Steve a situation in which thousands of birds decide to create a rookery on his property, and he will create a protected wildlife sanctuary.

Steve is a fourth-generation sawyer along the Florida/Georgia border near Lake Seminole. He's come a long way since his great-grandfather's steam operated sawmill, yet he has retained the pioneer spirit of his forebears. For his current mill, the latest of several, he utilized a B-4 Wisconsin motor — a known workhorse. He added hydraulic valves from a fertilizer wagon, hydraulic motors and parts off of a fertilizer spreader, an old forklift frame, an old sawmill track and several other odds and ends from his private collection of derelict vehicles and farm equipment carefully selected over the years.

"Everything has a use," says Steve. "It's just that sometimes you have to search for it."

Besides his innovative use of materials, what is refreshing about Steve is his conservation ethic. While he formerly used large circular blades from mills operated by his forebears, Cross now utilizes a band saw loop blade over 16 feet long. He converted to a band saw because of the smoothness of the cut and the increased yield. "The band saw removes $\frac{1}{16}$ of the wood when it cuts and



the circular saw would cut about $\frac{5}{16}$. In four cuts, you'll save over a one inch board," he says.

To take a tour with Steve through his family's 616-acre tract is an experience in time travel. A large old-growth hardwood forest is carefully protected along with a 100-acre cypress swamp. While poling an old aluminum boat on one of his rare excursions into the swamp ("I hate to disturb the birds," he says), Steve points out young alligators lurking in dark waters. Rounding a bend, countless egrets, herons, anhingas, wood storks and white ibis erupt in a dizzying cacophony of squawks and cries. Graceful birds swoop and dive through tangled branches. Nests decorate almost every branch of shoreline trees. Curious white feathered nestlings pop up heads to stare at rare human visitors.

According to Steve, the birds have

To take a tour with Steve through his family's 616-acre tract is an experience in time travel.

adopted this swamp in the past 25-30 years, mainly due to its isolation and the elimination of DDT as a farm pesticide. "I took a wildlife biologist out here," Steve says, "and he estimated that there are between 10 and 20 thousand birds during the peak months. They're down a bit now because of the drought we had, but I'm hoping that they'll start coming back like they were."

Steve's tanned and sun-etched face glows with pride when he speaks of the swamp. "It's good that the birds have a place to nest and raise like this," he says, "especially since some of them are rare type of birds or endangered type of birds. We want to preserve the land as a wildlife refuge."

The rookery is one of many wildlife sanctuaries that exist on private land, and it is good to know that there are guardians like Steve Cross, a true wildlife friend. ●



Steve retrieves a freshly cut board from his sawmill.

Below: Steve poles a johnboat through his family's protected cypress swamp and rookery.

Page 28: Steve and Lightning relax in his family's protected old-growth forest.





As summer heat gives way to the first cool breezes of fall, many

Floridians dust off their bird feeders in anticipation of colorful songbirds migrating back to Florida for the winter. Those of us who are handy with tools repair old feeders and build new wooden feeding platforms to replace old ones that are falling apart. At this time of year the home centers and feed stores have a wide selection of new bird feeders on display, and they stock birdseed in 10, 25 and 50-pound bags.

Naturally, bird lovers want to pick out a good spot in the yard for their bird feeders. The location is usually just outside the house in front of a favorite window, maybe near the porch or close to the deck. One of the main reasons for having bird feeders is because we

want to be able to see the birds. Right? So the feeder will occupy that place by the window or deck all winter long. We know by experience that if a platform feeder is piled high with birdseed, we can place it just about anywhere and the birds will come to it. The bigger the platform the more birds it will handle. If too many birds frequent the feeders and there does not seem to be enough room for them all, we might even scatter some seed on the ground so all the birds can have their share of food. The seed spillage that collects under the platform or silo feeders may even sprout, giving us millet plants, or a sunflower or two. A little birdseed on the ground is no problem when we can buy it fairly cheap, 50 pounds at a time.

Unknown to us is that we are setting up our feathered friends for a bad case of salmonellosis or salmonella poisoning. Salmonella are bacteria that most of us are used to hearing about in association with raw chicken and eggs. One strain of salmonella occurs in bird droppings and moldy seed that has been contaminated by infected droppings. According to the National Wildlife Health Center (NWHC) located in Madison, Wisconsin, salmonellosis is a common cause of mortality in birds at bird feeders.

Bird feeders usually cause birds to congregate in the feeding area in higher

Are You Killing Birds With Kindness?

By Garry Foster
Photographs by William J. Weber

Salmonella outbreaks associated with bird feeding stations have been reported in many areas of the United States, including several in Florida.

numbers than usually found in nature. In some areas of the state during the winter months it is not uncommon to have a hundred or more birds at a single feeding station. This artificially high bird density offers a greater chance for disease transmission among the birds.

Salmonella outbreaks associated with bird feeding stations have been reported in many areas of the United States, including several in Florida. salmonellosis can be spread from bird to bird by direct contact, but is more commonly acquired through ingesting contaminated food or water. Salmonella contamination is usually transmitted by a carrier bird which may appear to be healthy, but is shedding the bacteria in its fecal droppings. Sick birds may appear unkempt with ruffled feathers, may seem lethargic and linger around or on feeders for extended periods of time. Dead birds may be seen in the vicinity of the feeders.

In north-central Florida, one reported salmonella outbreak at a feeding station involved 10 different species of birds, spanned two years and caused the death

of almost 100 birds. Bird species involved in this die-off were the tufted titmouse, blue jay, brown thrasher, red-winged blackbird, cardinal, common grackle, chipping sparrow, ground dove, house sparrow and white-throated sparrow. Other bird species can also be infected.

So how do we enjoy the birds at our feeders and help keep them healthy at the same time? The NWHC lists eight precautionary steps we can take to avoid salmonella and other bird feeder-related diseases:

1. Avoid overcrowding by providing ample feeder space. If you have a large number of birds frequenting your feeding station, have several feeders and locate them in various areas around your yard.
2. Clean up waste food and droppings from under the feeders. An infected bird could contaminate the waste seed that has accumulated under the feeder through its droppings. In moist conditions the waste seed will also mold, which is not good for the birds.
3. Provide feeders that do not have sharp points or edges on them. Bacteria

can enter a healthy bird at the site of a scrape or cut.

4. Keep the feeders clean and disinfect them regularly. Wash feeders with soap and water, and rinse well. Disinfecting each feeder once or twice a month should be adequate unless you see birds that may look unhealthy. Then, feeders should be cleaned and disinfected weekly. A simple solution of one part household chlorine bleach to nine parts water can be used to disinfect the feeders after they are cleaned. After disinfecting the feeders, rinse them well with clean water.

5. Use good food which is clean and dry. If you find mold or fungus growing on your bird food or if it smells musty, discard it.

6. Disinfect the feed containers and associated scoops and tools the same way as you do the feeders.

7. Keep your birdseed in closed containers to prevent the stored seed from being contaminated by rodents. Do not wait until you see sick or dead birds to act. Try to prevent disease before it happens.

8. Spread the word about bird feeder-associated diseases to neighbors who also have feeders. Birds can move from yard to yard and feeder to feeder spreading disease wherever they may fly. A few other preventive measures would be to move feeders to different locations in your yard on a regular basis throughout the year; avoid placing feed directly on the ground; make sure platform feeders are scrubbed and allow the disinfecting solution to run into all the crevasses; and make sure birdbaths and water sources are kept clean and the water frequently changed.

The National Wildlife Health Center has a free brochure, "Coping with Diseases at Bird Feeders," which you can request by writing them at 6006 Schroeder Road, Madison, WI, 53711, or by calling them at (608) 271-4640.

By following a few simple preventive measures, we can both enjoy birds at our feeders and help to keep their visit a healthy one. ●

Garry Foster is a biological scientist at the College of Veterinary Medicine's Wildlife Disease Laboratory at the University of Florida.



The tufted titmouse, above, and the northern cardinal, page 30, are frequent guests at most home bird feeders and are therefore susceptible to feeder-related illnesses.

CONSERVATION UPDATE

Compiled by Doug Alderson

ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF FLORIDA'S FISH AND WILDLIFE

A recent economic study by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) reveals that local area economies can reap significant benefits from Florida wildlife management areas. Analyzing sales data from October 1999 through May 2000 in Osceola County, it was determined that 47 jobs are directly linked to the Three Lakes Wildlife Management Area. The amount of spending by non-resident visitors (people who live outside of Osceola County), agency spending and the amount of local and state tax revenues generated by this spending amounted to over \$1.5 million in total sales to the local area economy during the study period.

Statewide an FWC study showed that hunting, freshwater fishing, wildlife viewing and saltwater fishing in the year 2000 generated approximately \$5.5 billion in retail sales, resulting in an economic impact to the State of Florida of \$7.8 billion. Florida sales tax benefits are estimated at \$336 million and 138,210 jobs are directly associated with Florida's fish and wildlife-related recreation.

Both studies can be reviewed in more detail on the FWC's Web site by looking under "Economic Studies" at: www.floridaconservation.org/sitemap.htm.

RODNEY L. BARRETO NEW FWC COMMISSIONER

Commissioner Rodney L. Barreto, 43, took the oath of office in September to become the newest member of the FWC. Barreto is a native Floridian who grew up hunting and fishing in south Florida. He enjoys boating and hiking and is a certified scuba diver. The founder of a public affairs firm in Miami and Tallahassee, Barreto stresses a need for good communication and cooperation between those who enjoy the outdoors and those who protect the outdoors.



GOOD NEWS FOR LEOPARD FROGS

Thousands of leopard frogs used to die every night trying to cross the four-lane U.S. 441 at Paynes Prairie State Preserve, but thanks to four new "eco-passages" under the roadway, very few if any frogs are being caught in traffic. Concrete walls on either side of the highway help to funnel frogs and other wildlife into the passages. "With the walls,

they don't have the option of going over," said biologist Jamie Barichivich of the U.S. Geological Survey.

WEST NILE POTENTIAL THREAT TO SCRUB JAYS

If the West Nile virus moves into central and south Florida as expected, state and federal biologists will be on the alert for any impacts on the threatened Florida scrub jay. "The problem that we face with scrub jays is they are already so precarious, their numbers are so low, that we worry about catastrophic events," says Nancy Douglass, a regional wildlife biologist for the FWC out of Lakeland. "A robust population, with lots of animals, can afford to lose quite a few. When you have a population that is no longer robust, you tilt the scales toward extinction." The Florida scrub jay is a close cousin to the more common crow and blue jay, birds that have been especially susceptible to the West Nile virus.

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Regions

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(850) 265-3678

North Central

Julie L. Jones, director
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Southwest

Greg Holder, director
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South

Mark Robson, director
8535 Northlake Boulevard
West Palm Beach, 33412
(561) 625-5122

TTD (850) 488-9542

Southern leopard frog by Lizabeth West

CONSERVATION UPDATE

ASK THE EXPERTS

"Ask The Experts" was the theme of an open house and exhibit at the FWC South Region Office in West Palm Beach last August. Designed to create an informal meeting ground between the agency and its public, several hundred visitors chatted with FWC experts about panthers, alligators, black bears, manatees, snakes, the Everglades Youth Camp, reef fish, planting for wildlife, sea turtles, exotic fish, hunting, fishing, hunter-education, "Becoming An Outdoor Woman," boating safety, the K-9 program and law enforcement careers. Fourteen local conservation groups also staffed information tables and displays.

"It was an ideal setting to showcase the agency's rich human resources and build a bridge to the community," said Mark Robson, FWC South Regional Director.



Ask The Lieutenant

Mr. L:

I recently purchased a home in Florida and will be moving down from Iowa in December. My backyard faces a small pond. Do I need to worry about alligators and my dog in the backyard? If they are there, will I be able to see them?

— Worried in Des Moines

Dear Worried:

The unfortunate reality is that alligators are everywhere in Florida. They're found in practically every marsh, lake and river throughout the state and are part of our rich wildlife diversity. The good news is, if your yard is fenced you will definitely minimize any problems with alligators, or other creatures for that matter. The simplest and best way to tell if there are alligators in your lake or pond is to go out at night during the warmer months with a strong flashlight and look for their eyes. When you shine a light on them at night their eyes look eerily red, almost like small red Christmas tree lights.

Most people avoid problems with gators by not allowing their dogs to swim in waters inhabited by larger alligators (six feet and larger). Where there are nuisance alligator situations (gators four feet and larger) that pose a threat to an individual or their property, including pets, we'll issue a permit to a trapper to remove and kill the gator.

—Lt.

Correcting a Goof:

In my last column, I gave the wrong answer pertaining to recreational crabbing. That paragraph should read: "As a recreational crabber (up to five traps), it is illegal to put your traps in navigation channels. If your traps are attended during the night, such as being suspended from a pier while you fish nearby, you can work them. If they are unattended, they cannot be worked during the night. If you leave them out and unattended, the float marking them should bare the letter 'R'."

— Lt.

CALENDAR

NOVEMBER

- 2-4 Families Understanding Nature (F.U.N.) Camp, Everglades Youth Camp
- 3 Free duck hunting workshop, FWC Hunter Ed. Training Center, Ocala National Forest
- 3-4 Florida Sportsman Fishing Show, Orlando
- 7-11 Spacecoast Birding and Wildlife Festival, Titusville
- 10 Project WILD/Aquatic WILD workshop, Pelotes Island Preserve, Jacksonville
- 16-18 Becoming an Outdoors Woman workshop, West Palm Beach
- 17-18 Shallow Water Fishing Expo, Tampa
- 17-18 Kid's Fishing Clinic, St. Petersburg Boat Show, St. Petersburg
- 24 Ocean Reef Grunt Rodeo, Key Largo

DECEMBER

- 1 Metropolitan south Florida Fishing Tournament Mini-met, Key West
- 1 Project Learning Tree workshop, Pelotes Island Preserve, Jacksonville

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